

America's Great Outdoors
Notes from Youth Listening Session

Location: Annapolis, MD

Date: June 25, 2010

President Obama launched a national conversation about conservation in America at the White House Conference on the Great Outdoors on April 16, 2010. The President understands that protecting and restoring the lands and waters that we love and reconnecting people to the outdoors must happen at the local level. Therefore, President Obama directed the principal leaders of the Initiative to travel across the country to listen and learn from people directly involved in finding grassroots solutions to conserve our lands, waterways, historical and cultural resources and to reconnect Americans with the Outdoors. The President indicated that the sessions should engage the full range of interested groups, including tribal leaders, farmers and ranchers, sportsmen, community park groups, foresters, youth groups, businesspeople, educators, State and local government, recreation and conservation groups and others. The President placed a special priority on engaging with America's youth. Below are notes from the breakout groups at the Listening Session sorted by Discussion Question. Please feel free to use the ideation tool at <http://ideas.usda.gov/ago/ideas.nsf/> if you would like to share your thoughts.

Discussion Questions

Y1. Where do you go when you are not indoors?

Y2. What do you do personally to protect the environment?

Y3. What are some obstacles and challenges that prevent young people from spending time outdoors?

Y4. What recommendations would you make to President Obama to get more young people engaged in, and connected to, the outdoors?

Discussion Question Y1-Y4	Comment
Y1	public parks around neighborhood; no national park near house – but Dad works for NPS so on vacation they go to national parks – grew up going to national parks with family; historical house site – tour house; but bike and hike, too
Y1	local park, Druid Hill; spends a lot of time at harbor in Baltimore City – habitat environment; beach volleyball --> historical hill
Y1	camping; no national parks near house – but local parks, Gun Powder; hiking, kayaking
Y1	Not many parks near house; no national parks – doesn't spend too much time outdoors
Enough easy accessible open spaces?	NO – have to travel 30 minutes
Enough easy accessible open spaces?	Greenbelt Park... but not much of anything – just a big open space, not a park
Enough easy accessible open spaces?	go to local/school parks, but not enough
Y2	tries not to take cars; bikes everywhere, takes metro; composts and recycles; look at

	labels of all brands – looks for containers that are compostable
Y2	not as conscious
Y2	stopped buying plastic water bottles; “recycling nut” – goes in trashcan and pulls out recyclables;
How do you change people’s perspectives who are not concerned about the same things? Engage them without alienating them?	recycling is inconvenient; government only collects trash one time a week – put up more recycling bins
How do you change people’s perspectives who are not concerned about the same things? Engage them without alienating them?	<p>Give people facts, make changes convenient; talk to people – best way is to communicate – educate them on importance and make it EASY for them to do it – inequalities exist based on where you live</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get big businesses into recycling
Y3	quality of parks; distance and lack of accessibility
Y3	mass distraction of virtual worlds – needs to be a reconnect to Mother Nature
Y3	Spending too much time on facebook!
Y3	safety as a concern
Y3	stay positive though – try to be safe and keep boundaries; don’t go in areas where you aren’t comfortable
Being so distracted by virtual world – being outside no longer feels natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • nothing to do in parks; basketball court, swing set, ropes → don’t want to be there when it’s dilapidated and vandalized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ If it’s fixed and built well, people will come ○ Rebuild new playground sets – kids will come!
Being so distracted by virtual world – being outside no longer feels natural	field trips with kids – instead of going to museums, take them into nature and to parks; school initiatives – because you can’t go that far away on a school day (and national parks may be really far from you)
Being so distracted by virtual world – being outside no longer feels	also has to do with mindset

natural	
Being so distracted by virtual world – being outside no longer feels natural	everyone is on facebook; accepting change; communicate with new people in a new market and new way – THROUGH facebook
Q4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Main themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Access to park ○ Making outdoors more exciting ○ Education ○ Quality of parks
Q4	more youth outreach programs in high school – job opportunities; government came to him – made it much easier
Q4	very confusing to look online and try and find jobs
Q4	got job through cousin
Q4	never heard of NPS before they came to me
Q4	MAKE JOBS EASIER AND MORE ACCESSIBLE – GO TO STUDENTS Raising public awareness that these opportunities exist and make it easier to get jobs
Q4	getting voice out there – “being green is the in thing” – make being outdoors the “in” thing; have adventures and fun parties to entice kids – i.e. AdventuresNYC (free outdoors activities!); one awesome experience in the outdoors can be life-changing
Q4	how do you get people outside if they’re just not interested? Not events... sports. Need something for everyone
Q4	mandate volunteer time
Q4	service time; educate through schools
Suggestions for improvement of listening session	rushed – more time; extend it
Suggestions for improvement of listening session	good idea to divide people randomly
Things we didn’t talk about	Be outdoors next time
Things we didn’t talk about	Don’t provide plastic water bottles!
Y1	I like going to State parks

Y1	I like going downtown, walking around, seeing all the hustle and bustle
Y1	I like to go to state and national parks and kayak on freshwater rivers
Y1	I like to go hiking in the national forests because I live nearby
Y1	The parks in Anacostia... I am a martial artist and I like training outside to get the chi from the ground and outside
Y1	I would love to get out to the mountains but it is hard to find time
Y2	I just started going green. We're in this world and it is kind of hard to go green, but we're learning. Over the past few months I've been trying to recycle and find other ways to conserve.
Y2	I try to commute more by the train and bus... and get a bicycle too.
Y2	I try to conserve as many resources as possible, like paper, or water while I'm washing dishes. And you can reduce the amount of resources you use every day.
Y2	I support local food by going to local markets and frequent restaurants that use food grown on local farms.
Y2	I try to do all of those things and try to buy more local foods.
Y2	I work for a project where we go to low income homes and teach them how to save energy by changing light bulbs to CFLs. A lot of these people aren't educated about going green, but most of them know about CFLs so we start there.
Y2	I'm trying to raise student awareness about environmental issues, but it is difficult because a lot of students aren't really interested in the issues.
Y2	I try to volunteer in student groups or wildlife based groups that clean up roads.
Y2	It's more of an individual thing for me which I don't like because I think that organized conservation efforts are important.
Y2	Just the fact that you do it says a lot more. My family always kind of makes fun of me for the things I do to conserve energy, but it has gotten to the point where they see that it really means something to me, so they don't make fun of me anymore.
Y2	A lot of my friends were really living the green way... like by not using plastic bags. The individual effort is where it starts initially before it gets organized. I try to lead by example... I will show you what I do, not tell you.
Y2	It's become a sort of a trend where it's popular to do this... which is good because now

	everybody thinks it's cool to be green.
Y2	The trend is a good thing, but if it is uneducated, then you need to figure out why buying local food is a good thing.
Y2	Yeah, the hippie kids don't really know what they're doing; they are just following the trend.
Y2	And the hippie types may not realize whether they're helping or hurting the cause.
Y3	Anacostia Park was one of my favorite places to go, but they tore up the track so I can't run. I had to find another place. I would look at the river and be disgusted at the water. In Richmond, I love going to the parks with rivers or lakes and the body of water always attracted me, which is what I liked in Anacostia. The other place at Hains Point was a great park... I liked the statue of the man that's coming out of the ground.
Y3	There aren't enough events for people to enjoy the outdoors. I like the urban downtown parks, but people don't embrace it because there is nothing to do. There are events once or twice a year but we need more... events like hug a tree
Y3	Concerts, plays, movies...
Y3	Free events!
Y3	Getting to the city parks is easy but getting to the National Parks around the city is very difficult without a car.
Y3	Some type of public transportation to the parks... on weekdays or holidays would help.
Y3	Yeah, just more public access would be helpful.
Y3	Or if they made an app for the iPhone would help tune people in to the outdoors.
Y3	Yeah, it could even tell you what kind of birds you're looking out.
Y4	What Diamond said was poignant. We are plugged in and need to find a way to connect the two. When I have my iPod in listening to music, I can use it to help connect me to the outdoors. The GPS in the phone already has the outline of the area, so it can show me where the parks are.
Y4	More funding for organic and green agriculture. Incentives too for local food systems, supporting green, organic, and local foods.
Y4	There need to be programs in public schools to encourage them to go outside. Educate the kids when they're small.

Y4	And it's important to keep that up throughout middle school and high school, because it becomes uncool in a few years. Need to keep that message with them.
Y4	Encourage parents to bring the kids outside, so that they can show them where to go, what to do, and how to do it safely.
Y4	We need to find a way to teach the parents too because they don't really know either. Need to bring them in more to a school structure where you have to learn this stuff. We know these things but we don't understand them and it would be helpful to really learn about them
Y4	A community garden initiative using eminent domain instead of just letting extra land go to waste.
Y4	I see these gardens popping up more and more often just in the most humble places you can think of around the city.
Y4	More community gardens allows more kids to garden and give them more understanding of the process that goes into growing food.
Y4	It always seems to be like a one time thing and then the garden falls apart. It would be helpful to have a weekly program... the garden needs to be kept going.
Y4	Get more people interested in growing their own food, it would cut down on gas and other things. So you don't have to go to California to get oranges in DC. It's logical because you get more for your money and you waste less.
Y4	I know of this program which brings in local food to schools because most of the cafeteria food is really all processed food. So they would slowly bring in locally grown foods from nearby farms and inform the students about where the food came from.
Y4	That's why elementary school gardens are so important... because it lets the kids know where their food came from
Y4	I know that Obama has already increased funding, but expanding organizations like SCA which engage youth would be good, since it starts at a young age and builds from there. We need to get youth involved in these programs and internships. But it doesn't just have to be SCA, it can be other conservation associations. If we could have 10,000 interns per year it would allow more youth to work on public lands.
Y4	Along the same lines with the gardens, having people at a young age go out to see how to preserve a park... show what is done to help erosion, removal of invasive species, things like that. Anything to help people get down and dirty and understand the work that goes

	into preserving land.
Y4	We need to encourage parents and teachers since kids listen to their teachers a lot and they need to emphasize environmentalism. That's how I got into the movement.
Y4	I would suggest being a little more unconventional about the approach. You have the Boys and Girls Club, Parks and Rec, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. There are lots of different organizations.... You can incorporate something into this. It doesn't have to just be schools... you can have promotional things on the bus or the train. All of these groups have mentors since the kids are being coached or taught.
Y4	I think we depend too much on schools. Schools have lots of priorities, but very limited time. This is recreation, not just school stuff.
Y4	We have to get to where the kids are... they see all this stuff, it's not just in their schools. Every kid has an iPod, we have to let them pull us in to pull them back in. All these iPhones and apps and cell phones. We have to get cool for them to like us.
Y4	Social networking sites are a great example. You can post conservation events and opportunities to get involved with the NPS and create sites so you can become friends of a national park
Y4	And those tests or quizzes.... People love those. I've taken thousands of those.
Y4	Or you can post events on there.
Y4	But how can you make them want to go?
Y4	It depends on the event and the person.
Y4	What do kids do on the weekends? They go to the movies, get ice cream... Bu the park service has events. Need to make the kids want to go... it doesn't cost money, which is a start.
Y4	Community gardens are great ways of increasing the access to superlocal food. It helps establish a better food system and give people a better understanding.
Y4	The carbon footprint goes down tremendously since you don't have to drive the food 2000 miles
Y4	Promote wider involvement in public and community gardens and make community gardens more abundant and more available

Y4	Also you can compost stuff from your own house for the garden
Y4	Giving the kids stuff like reusable water bottles, things that they could use and put to work makes a long lasting impression.
Y4	We have to make it as cool as superman
Y4	And adapt to the kid's interests.
Y4	It's not just bringing people into the parks, it's also raising awareness. Need to know why it should be protected.
Y4	Even just like a food drive where you bring a plant to put in the new garden that's been set up.
Final Group Priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Promote wider involvement in public and community gardens <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Make community gardens more abundant and more available The waste from nearby households can be composted for the garden Utilize modern technology, including cell phone apps and social networking, to bring kids into the parks and make the environment "cool" Get parents to promote involvement in environmental issues <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Parents need to be educated about the environment and encourage their children to spend time outside Some sort of adult education program to educate parents about the outdoors and the environment

Question (1-4)	Comments from breakout 1, 4 & 5
Y1	Goes on walks and rides bikes on public lands
Y1	Likes to see good scenery, defines open spaces as no buildings. He likes to be places where he can go to find himself
Y1	Likes going hiking and appreciates cool geological features

Y1	Also likes to bike
Y1	Likes going on the water
Y1	Likes hiking trails near water. Notes how littered the paths near the water in the Chesapeake are despite efforts.
Y2	Recycling. Notes the importance of DC providing people with the blue bins to promote recycling.
Y2	He tries to make sure nothing dangerous goes into runoff which goes into the gutters. He is reminded by the "Save the Bay" signs around Baltimore and motivated to preserve water quality. Thinks that environmental issues could be mitigated by increased awareness
Y2	Takes public transportation.
Y2	Works to clean up litter and trash
Y2	Thinks the biggest problem is water quality. Runoff gets into food.
Y2	Biggest problem is sewage and fertilizers getting into the bay. Also thinks md building requirements need revision.

Y3	Thinks that an obstacle to young people is that they aren't exposed early enough to the outdoors.
Y3	Thinks that an obstacle to young people is that they aren't exposed early enough to the outdoors and they don't know what they are missing out on.
Y3	Indifference is an obstacle. People are not aware of the outdoors and what is at stake. They also lack transportation.
Y3	An obstacle is that the outdoors is not 'group-orientated.' can make group orientated by having online community where encourage large groups to go outside together. Schools can also make the outdoors more accessible to groups by having available internships.
Y3	Shoals raise awareness about going outside, people do not know about outdoor activities nor do they know how to do them. Make outdoor activities more accessible.
Y3	Access is the main issue. The outdoors need to be more integrated into fieldtrips.
Y4	More public transportation. Refers to Hampton which is near the city, but nobody can get there because there is no bus service.
Y4	Need to make water more accessible for people (eg public loading and unloading)

Y4	Larger buffer zones between roads and outdoor spaces. Enjoyable spaces are being ruined by having roads too close.
Y4	Mandate outdoors experiences in schools. Make having to go outside mandatory. Make it another subject in school, like history.
Y4	Refers to "living classrooms" in which kids go on boat rides and are taught the importance of taking care of the environment. Conservation needs to become a personal issue.
Y4	"No child left inside" Teachers need to be provided with lesson plans, training, or park service representatives to make the teacher comfortable outside.
Y4	Thinks that the environment is related to all school subjects and should be incorporated. Science teachers engage kids about biology, English teachers help kids write poetry outside, etc.
Y4	Implement interactive activities. Kids are not interested in walking around places; they want to be doing something!
Y4	Kids need to be aware of outdoor activities. Have an online activity kit that they can download.
Y4	Implement an outdoor ed program at schools.
Y3	People would be more willing to ride bikes if there were bigger bike paths and if there was more awareness about cycling

Y3	In urban parks, people are deterred because of expensive parking. Talks about federal hill and how it is impossible to get into because of parking. Connecting public transit to outdoor spaces would promote outdoor activities.
Y3	He is a 3rd grade teacher and believes that there should be connections with schools to promote parks.
Y3	There need to be bigger bike paths to encourage cycling and alternative forms of transportation.
Y3	The cost of transportation is also an issue. Schools do not have the funding necessary to get kids to parks.
Y1.	Likes parks in the city, takes bus to park, hang out with friends.
Y3.	Teachers don't appreciate this time spent outdoors.
Y1.	Fishing, gardens.
Y4	Community gardens in outdoor areas get kids involved, many empty lots; give incentives to convert the space.
Y3	Society is experiencing push for universal computer literacy- we must have similar approach to outdoor education.
Y2.	Have to start young, have kids stop using plastic water bottles, they like knowing that they are doing something good for environment, reduce what use in first place.

Y3	Teachers won't let kids go outside if cold or hot, parents and teachers need to be involved.
Y4	Partner with corporations, her boys like Gatorade commercials, if they promote the idea kids will think cool. That's what kids listen to, have to speak their language.
Y1.	Trails, biking
Y4	The combination of education and getting young people on board to fight for conservation, kids go back to school and the kids can say they worked for parks, bring experience to peers.
Y2.	Took eco footprint test and now wants to reduce carbon footprint. She recycles, got her family involved, decreases her shower time, got recycling bins at her school. Really concerned about water pollution and chemical that pollute.
Y3	Teens see what others do, subject to peer pressure...kids will be afraid to step out..even if kids spent time outside, they aren't active, litter and smoke. Have to have meaningful experience when outdoors.
Y3.	A lot of education takes place indoors, she was only required to take 1 semester of PE, half a credit..even gym activities took place indoors, we must push for environmental education...parents afraid to let kids outside, want kids to be safe.

Y3.	Kids into tech, they are into social media, facebook, twitter - having activities outside should be a community effort. For example, sports to get kids outside.
Y1	Chevy forest, creek, likes to stay active, lives in DC area, running, likes to spend time with family outside camping, likes to see the stars.
Y2	Taking action on certain issues. Meadow creek md - this creek at brink of what it can handle in terms of toxins. He is worried that, if approved, a permit for a road will adversely affect the area. Thinks should use 60 millions for light rail instead. Connect light rail to metro. Also, driving down 210, he noticed that buildings are not used to full capacity. He is concerned about urban sprawl control, encourages smart growth.
Y3	Can't eliminate recess, lose leisure time outside, curriculum doesn't value outdoor time for kids, Finland as example. Homework one example of why kids can't get outside.
Y4	Kids will be in class 9 months/yr, have environmental education built into curriculum.
Y1	Trails, likes going to different parks, works at gunpowder falls park, worried about access to public areas, likes to take family to park.

Y2	He gets youth involved in recycling efforts, get support system for recycling, trail maintenance, and engage youth in environmental problems of that the community must...
Y3	He works with civic justice corps - takes at risk youth in parks, teach them about trail work, kids find their work to be rewarding through this program, see what they've done -we need more programs like the one he works with.
Y2	Have to educate youth - if they don't know, how can we expect them to help effort.
Y3	People don't think it's cool to be advocate for protecting the environment, kids have to know that it's good to be outdoors, must be encouraged to do things outside.
2	D.C. Parks aren't well maintained, but Virginia's are; Need to be able to get out easily - public access to trails
1	Community service and volunteer hours are important
1	Organizations need to educate
2	Trash is a big problem; lack of recycling in D.C.

3	Government and mismanagement of funds
3	Grassroots organizations in addition to government are important and need funding
2	Access to trails outside the city
1	Integrate the outdoors into the education system
3	Need to embrace technology
3	Go recruiting - talk to people
1	Integrate Earth Day into school and get kids to go outside
2	Emphasis on environmental education

1	Increase communications via outreach, public forums, social media
3	Increase access: partnering and helping support outdoor nonprofit organizations, and increasing access through public transportation
3	Lower rates to go to outdoor places; more sidewalks; free buses on code red days
Y1	Rock creek park
Y1	Areas around goucher college
Y1	Anacostia River, arboretums
Y1	Olmstead woods, the national cathedral
Y1	Southern Maryland Parks, wetlands and marshes
Y2	In my neighborhood in northeast DC, people put trash bags out on their fences and property to encourage people not to litter. It started informally, but now their available all over the place

Y2	Installed rain barrels at home and school to collect water
Y2	I pick up trash along the GW parkway for work, and make sure there are plenty of places available to put trash
Y2	Although it started originally because of a plumbing problem, now I collect water from the downspouts when it rains and use it to flush the toilets
Y2	It's important to focus on the little things you can do in your everyday life-changing light bulbs, showering efficiently, and recycling.
Y2	The environment isn't limited to just the outdoors. It's what's around us all the time. You need to be conscious of indoor and outdoor environments, then. One example is to choose plants for outside your home that improve the air quality.
Y3	A lack of knowledge. We need outreach programs like flyers in neighborhoods. When people find out about these places and the problems they have, they want to volunteer more to help out.
Y3	People make choices by calculating the return on an investment. You can't do this for the outdoors if you haven't had that experience or don't know the options. You need to give people information to help them calculate whether the time and effort devoted to an outdoor activity would be worthwhile.

Y3	In Baltimore, distance to open spaces and lack of accessibility keep people from getting out. One project that's been started is to change the community by converting vacant lots into green spaces. It's important to focus on parks in culturally different neighborhoods
Y3	Transportation. Kids may hear about opportunities, but never visually see it. To help with this, the Ground Works Team went to Great Falls. Some of those young people had lived around here their whole life and never seen it in person. You have to give them the chance to see it, and awareness that it's public space. So they can go home and say, "Hey, mom, you can go here, you can have a cookout there." People are not going to go out of their way if they're just going to be by themselves, too. It needs to be perceived as a popular thing to do.
Y3	People tend to put off getting outside because of time, weather, any number of excuses. You just have to know the right time.
Y3	People don't understand the benefits of getting out.
Y3	It's not just about getting people out there, but how to use it once they're there. Some people see a mountain as a place to ski, some want to hike up it, others just think it's pretty. You have to show people all the options of how to enjoy it.

Y3	So, one thing that it sounds like needs to be done is put all these ideas in language that young people understand.
Y3	Yeah, and its really hard right now when teachers are forced to teach to standards. We're cutting gym classes and creative teaching activities because we have to cater to the tests.
Y3	So maybe that kid-friendly language more engrained in DOE curriculum standards
Y3	It's also important to share the available information with family and parents. They're the ones who are really going to encourage interest in their children.
Y4	Some of the main issues that seem to keep coming up are making information available to open spaces easier for all people, and incorporating the outdoors into education- especially because school is the one thing that affects all young people
Y4	We could make programs that show the importance of the environment. We have one earth with limited resources, so it's important to realize that we need to make it better not by acting for more, but by improving our quality of life with what we have
Y4	We could focus on education aimed at kids, to take it home to their parents. If a kid says "Hey, I heard about this cool thing to do," Parents are going to check it out

Y4	We also need to find a way to accommodate standards while taking field trips, using the power of place to teach lessons.
Y4	Yeah, integrate the standards with place-based experience. You also need to do several lessons, take a systematic approach, with repeated emphasis. That's when kids really start to get it.
Y4	I think its when kids get to middle school and high school that we really need to try to get them. It's easy to encourage them to get outside when they're young, but just when they get old enough to really enjoy it, lots of other stuff starts to get in the way. More outdoor learning spaces would be good. Maybe new buildings that maintain the classroom focus, but allow students to be outside at the same time.
Y4	So the funding would come from somewhere else, and maybe NRCS or someone could provide directions to schools for how to go about it successfully.
Y4	Cutting school funding keeps out many topics, so we probably need to focus on alternative types of education outside of school. It might call for a separate campaign for environmental education beyond the classroom.
Y4	Maybe some USDA and DOI outreach programs? We also need to make sure we get to kids in the places they already are, like a TV ad campaign, a brochure, something that gets them when they're not in school.

Y4	You could also do immersion education projects. For example you could read an article and do a research project on location somewhere outdoors. This encourages discover and incorporate slots of different learning styles to find how you personally relate to the environment.
Y4	Again holistic information about the outdoors and the environment
Y4	One thing we do at Anacostia to get people to see the place is river tours. Maybe we could bring schools out with free transpiration so people are out there, see the pollution, and want to help. You could also provide routes using public transportation.
Y4	Yeah, Like showing parks and how to get to them on the metro maps. That would be cool. And providing people with alternate transportation that's project or experience specific.
Y5	Work with department of Education to incorporate outdoor education into curriculum standards.
Y5	Information outreach campaign that targets kids outside of school, with a broad view to encourage different interests.
Y5	Provide alternative transportation, special day programs and route planning to help people figure out how to get out.

Y5	I know Baltimore does free buses on the weekends to certain parts of the city. It would be cool if public transportation went free to parks or historic sites make them more widespread.
Y5	The more parents know, the easier it is to tell their kids about it, even if they already know. Parents are the ones who can really encourage and make an interest. I mean amusement parks give discounts, and parents take their kids there. If you made some kind of a special event at parks people would go
Y5	It would also be good to educate people about the outdoors in a way that gets a lot of people involved, like a community garden. It draws the whole family in to create participation and awareness.
Y5	You also need enough willing participants to start the process on some sort of big community event. Like paid staffers need to back it up, and be willing to give their time to prepare and clean up and help out.
Y5	We need more days like Earth Day. One day a year is good, but there needs to be more chances for lots of people to get together and mix education and outreach.
Y5	An environmental fair would be good, too

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